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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a university course on counseling women designed to provide an integration of: (1) a general cognitive understanding of women along psychological, physiological, sociological, and developmental dimensions; (2) a recognition and understanding of cognitive-developmental theory as a framework within which to counsel women; and (3) counseling strategies for working with a female population. Emphasis is on the importance of developing each class member's personal awareness of the issues related to women and their roles in society. The cognitive-developmental basis of the course is presented and its influence on the course is described, including the encouragement of students to assess their own cognitive development and to view the subject matter from a broad perspective. The theoretical foundations of the course and the developmental instruction model used in its design are discussed. The history of the course is briefly reviewed and the application of the course process design to other settings is recommended. A course outline is also provided. (NRB)

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COUNSELING WOMEN COURSE:
A Course Description

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Course Description

Counseling Women Course

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Theoretical Base and Major Features

Cognitive-developmental theory provided the foundation upon which the course "Counseling Women" was built. Theory was used to provide a conceptual framework within which to place the developmental process of the individual taking the course and the developmental issues involved in counseling women for a variety of concerns.

A major feature of this course was the use of theory at three levels: 1) applied to the instruction process in general and to the course design in particular; 2) applied to the level of cognitive development and complexity of women in general and to the students in this class in particular; and, 3) applied to the counseling process in general and the counseling of women in particular. Theory thus constituted both course process as well as content.

The course was designed using the developmental instruction model designed by Knefelkamp (1974) and Widick(1975). This model applies the theories of Chickering (1975) and Perry (1970) concerning the development of college students and of Erickson (1968) and Loevinger and Wessler (1970) concerning a more general less age-related population to the instructional method. Perry's model is used most explicitly. It encompasses nine stages of intellectual and ethical growth. The three main processes for conceptualizing content within these nine stages are: 1) in dogmatic absolutes (dualistically); 2) with a realization

of and an acknowledgement of different viewpoints (relativistically); and 3) with an acknowledgement of different viewpoints yet with commitment to a position (relativistically with commitment). Knefelkamp and Widick have developed an instructional methodology built around the stage of cognitive development of the students in the class and designed to increase their cognitive complexity. These researchers have documented that four particular challenges and supports (called variables), diversity, structure, personalism and experience, can be built into a course by the instructor in such a way that they match the developmental state and needs of the students in the course. Applied according to the needs of the students, they promote the personal intellectual and emotional growth of these students. An example from the course under discussion will help clarify this point. Many of the students who enrolled in "Counseling Women" held stereotypic (or dualistic) views of women, women's roles and of themselves as women in this Society. Alternative viewpoints were deliberately presented as part of the curriculum (the variable of diversity) and students were encouraged to examine themselves, other women and women's roles from a variety of perspectives. The diversity was presented gradually so as not to overwhelm the students. Students were encouraged to work together on projects as a means of getting to know other women as individuals and not only as rivals. (the variable of support). Most, if not all of the students changed and/or broadened their perspective on women. For many, increased options were a great revelation (and a relief!)

Widick, Knefelkamp and Parker (1975) have suggested that developmental theory also provides an appropriate conceptual framework for the counseling process itself. Furthermore, Knefelkamp, Widick and Stroad (1976) applied the developmental schema to the counseling of women and demonstrated its usefulness to counselors and their female clients. These models were presented and developed in the class.

This course stressed the integration of knowledge about the psychology of women and the counseling of women. The psychology of women was addressed through course readings, lectures and research projects. Emphasis was placed upon empirical or experimental evidence; however, students were also encouraged to read popular and/or theoretical pieces about the psychology of women and women's issues. Students were required to submit papers or to prepare class presentations on topics of particular concern to women and to address developmental considerations, counseling issues and recommended strategies. In-class skill training occurred including exercises, demonstrations and role plays. The course covered all three competency areas of knowledge, skills and attitudes recommended by the APA Division 17 Ad Hoc Committee on Women.

Course History

This course was originally designed as a graduate level course for students in counseling/counseling psychology. Ann opportunity arose to adapt the course to a general undergraduate population

and to teach it through University of Maryland University College (the continuing education campus) during spring semester 1976. Nineteen women (most of whom were not counseling or psychology majors) enrolled due to interest in or curiosity about the Women's Movement and issues generated by it. No hard data were collected on the cognitive development of these women; however, analysis of logs kept by them over the course of the semester revealed an obvious change in their thinking about counseling women and about themselves.

Application to Other Settings

This course has not been taught since its "trial run". A variation or update of it should be considered for widespread application nonetheless because of its unique process design. This design makes it easily adaptable to a wide variety of topics, settings and curricular emphases. This feature has been demonstrated at the University of Maryland where the course design has been applied with success to such diverse courses as English, career development, peer helper training and introductory counseling, to name a few. As for counseling women, the dual content/process design encompasses the competencies of knowledge, skills and attitudes as recommended by the Division 17 Ad Hoc Committee on Women as critical competencies needed in the counseling of women. In addition, theory and practice are integrated.

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Course Outline--"Counseling Women"

This course is designed to provide an integration of 1) a general cognitive understanding of women along several dimensions (psychological, physiological, sociological, developmental); 2) a recognition of and understanding of cognitive-developmental theory as a framework within which to counsel women; and 3) counseling strategies for working with a female population. An important component of the course is the development of a personal awareness on the part of class members of issues related to women and their roles in society.

OBJECTIVES

1. to provide information on traditional and contemporary developmental theories concerning women.

2. to apply developmental theory as a basis for counseling women.

3. to provide a classroom atmosphere conducive to student growth on several levels:
   a. general awareness of self within the cognitive-developmental framework.
   b. awareness of self as helper or counselor.
   c. awareness of one's own attitudes and values concerning the role of women in society.

4. to cover content material which will address the many issues relating to the societal role of women.

5. to promote awareness of how counselors'attitudes towards women as a group affect the counseling process.

5. to provide an understanding of the counseling of women within the context of human development counseling and to formulate strategies for the counseling of women clientele.

COURSE OUTLINE

Meeting 1. Introduction.
The introductory class will determine the mutual expectations of the instructor and of the students and will introduce and explain the purpose and objectives of the course.

Meetings 2 & 3. Theories of Development.
(Unit 1) This unit will provide an overview of several developmental theories in order to focus the class on identity issues along a developmental continuum.
TOPICS: Chickering, Loevinger, Perry models.

Meetings 4-7. Theories of Female Identity and Development.
(Unit 2) Unit 2 will present the cultural context within which

females have been defined in our society. Research findings and theories about female identity and development will be covered.
TOPICS: 1. psychological aspects including theories of sex differences and personality, achievement research, interest theories, assertiveness, etc. 2. social aspects including sex role stereotyping, general lifestyle development and how it differs from that of males.

Meetings 8-12. Counseling Women: Issues
(Unit 3) This unit will support and refine much of the material of the previous unit while placing particular emphasis on female mental health, women in therapy, counselor bias and approaches for effective counseling.
TOPICS: Historical perspectives on female mental health and therapy, research findings on counselor bias and gender of client and counselor, counseling approaches, and a cognitive developmental framework within which to view the counseling of women.

Meetings 12-15. Special Topics in Counseling
(Unit 4) This unit will cover areas and issues of special interest in the counseling of women.
POSSIBLE TOPIC AREAS: Career, reproduction issues, sexuality, health care, aging, sexual and physical assault, marriage, general lifestyle, etc.

Meeting 16 Wrap-up
The final class will be geared towards evaluating the class and self-growth. An integration of the material and a final "pulling together" of class topic and themes will be the priority issues for this class meeting.